

## RUFFNER FUNERAL HOME HISTORIC DISTRICT (EDMUND WELLS RESIDENCE) A PRESCOTT HISTORIC PRESERVATION DISTRICT

### 13.1 DISTRICT OVERVIEW AND HISTORY

#### 13.1.1 Overview and History



*Ruffner Funeral Home Historic District (Edmund Wells Residence), 303 South Cortez Street; 1888, c. 1930, and Today*

The principal building of the Ruffner Funeral Home Historic District is the former home of Judge Edmund Wells, a prominent early citizen of the City of Prescott and the Territory and State of Arizona. Edmund Wells settled in Prescott in 1864 and lived there until his death in the 1930s. As a young man, he was employed as a clerk in the Quartermaster's Office at Fort Whipple. Here he gathered many of the stories of the Territorial Capital which he later related in his book, *Argonaut Tales*. In 1869, he married Rosalind Banghart, the daughter of a pioneer cattleman. They were to eventually have six children, all raised in this house. Wells served as District Attorney, Senator and Associate Justice of the Territorial Court, and was appointed to codify the State's laws. In 1912, Judge Wells was the Republican candidate for governor, but was defeated by George W.P. Hunt by less than 2,000 votes.

In February 1929, Lester Lee Ruffner purchased the home of Judge Wells. Ruffner soon began to run his undertaking business from the house, a use which has continued for nearly 70 years.

The house, designed and built by Frank G. Parker and Malcolm D. Campbell, is one of the few pre-1880 residences still standing in Prescott. It sits on three combined original Townsite parcels originally purchased by Richard McCormick in 1864. Upon completion in 1879, the house was described by a local newspaper as "the finest residence in Prescott." The style of the Wells Residence is principally derived from Victorian Italianate. Building features associated with the Italianate include the use of ornate window moldings, symmetrical massing and a low roof profile.

The Ruffner Funeral Home Historic District is a Prescott Preservation District and also resides near the center of the South Prescott Townsite National Register Historic District. The building is one of the oldest structures still standing in one of the oldest neighborhoods from the early Territorial days. In addition to the funeral home, the building has housed other small businesses over the years, and the old carriage house in the back now serves as a flower shop.

## 13.1.2 Location

The Wells Residence is located at 303 South Cortez Street, at the south-east corner of Cortez and East Carleton Streets. It is one block from the Courthouse Plaza and the many business, entertainment and government functions located there. The house is also located one block east of Montezuma Street, one of the busiest commercial corridors in Prescott. Several historic homes have been converted to business uses north of the Wells House between Carleton and Goodwin Streets.

The boundary of the district, along with current zoning, is shown on Figure 10-1.

## 13.1.3 Formation of the Historic District

The district was formed as the result of the Prescott Multiple Resource Area (MRA) survey and nomination of 1978. The ordinance establishing the local district was completed in July of 1979, and the local guidelines and standards for the district were approved by the Prescott City Council in September of 1996.

## 13.1.4 Prescott Preservation District Responsibilities

The Prescott Preservation Commission has review responsibilities for the Ruffner Funeral Home Historic District. The review process is required for any project requiring a building permit. Applicants are encouraged to meet with the City's Preservation Specialist prior to submission to answer any questions and obtain assistance in designing a historically compatible project.



*Front of the Wells Residence with the Sandstone Wall at Cortez Street*

## 13.2 DISTRICT QUALITIES AND DESIGN ELEMENTS

### 13.2.1 Architectural Overview

The Wells Residence is essentially symmetrical in plan and front elevation. It is two stories in height and of wood frame construction. Wood shiplap siding is used on both upper and lower exterior wall surfaces (although masonite appears to have been used on one addition on the rear of the building); shingles cover the roof. The roof itself is pitched with intersecting ridge lines. Gables are not articulated but have decorative tie beams in the upper section with decorated fascias. Windows and the central mass of the main facade both accentuate the vertical dimension. A pair of elaborately corbeled chimneys surmount the house.

Modifications have been numerous to the Wells Residence but the basic form and character are unchanged. Additions have been made to all elevations except the front (west). Some of these additions have been made more carefully than others, but most changes respect the essential integrity

of the building. Brick is used as a unifying element on most of the additions as a stem wall treatment; this extends to planter walls around the sides and back of the house.



*Detail of the Front Porch*

The principal areas of elaboration in Italianate houses are windows, cornices, porches (including porch support columns) and doorways. Most American examples show a free intermixing of details derived from both informal rural models as well as formal Renaissance townhouses. On the Wells Residence, Doric columns support a heavy cornice with ornate carved brackets along the length of the front porch, which extends almost the full extent of the front facade and is curved at either end. The entry door is centrally located on the front facade. The walls around the front door extend forward from the main part of the house on both floors, further accentuating the entry. A door exists on the second floor directly above the entry door, but the porch railings are missing. A porch also exists on the north face of the second story, but appears to be in poor condition.

Italianate window sashes most commonly have one or two pane glazing, both of which occur on the Wells Residence. Later windows include French panels of up to 24 panes. The tops of the windows are rectangular, with wide crown moldings at the top and flared wood trim at the sides. The front windows and the entry door have transoms. Windows are either single or paired.

Doors are wood and several (including the front) have large pane glazing in the door itself, rather than small panes in a frame surrounding the door, another feature common in Italianate houses. Doors occur in the same shape as windows; elaborate enframements above the doors are similar to those over the windows. A few of the windows have elongated diamond-shaped patterns on upper panes over plain single panes on the bottom. Awnings exist over some of the windows, particularly the front, which is compatible and also exists in many of the historic photographs of the house.

Lighting is simple and attached to the house, with one post-mounted light near the front property line. Two high-intensity street-type lights, however, are mounted directly to the house near the top of the gable on the south and west elevations.

Automobile access to both the funeral home and the flower shop is at the northeast corner of the property on Carleton Street. Placing the entry here has helped retain the character of the front elevation and preserved the sandstone wall and south garden area. The rear yard is paved with asphalt. The carriage house (a non-historic building) was converted to a commercial business (flower shop) in 1993. The carriage house is sheathed in masonite and is topped by a shingle roof. An old garage is located to the south of this building and a newer garage is located to the west. Both are used for storage and are not readily visible from the public right-of-way.

## **13.2.2 Landscape/Streetscape**

Much of the intact character of the Wells Residence may be seen as part of the streetscape, particularly along Cortez Street. An excellent sandstone wall with a massive cap borders the property on the north and west, which was installed when Cortez Street was graded down to its present level (the original street level was near the top of the sandstone wall). The wall exceeds seven feet in height near the southern property edge. The top of the wall has an ornamental iron fence which varies in height from about one foot to three feet where the wall is the highest above the sidewalk.

The southern portion of the Cortez Street side of the property has never been developed and contains a well maintained garden. In this garden are a variety of roses and ornamental bushes that, along with the lawn along the entire front of the house, presents an formal and historically compatible setting for the residence. Three large pine trees are on the property, including two alligator junipers which approach 40 feet in height.

Both the Cortez and Carleton Street edges have deep parkways, landscaped with mature maple trees and roses, surrounded by decomposed granite. The entry at the rear of the property is flanked by brick planters which contain roses and one which contains an old sandstone "hitching post." Near the rear of the property is an old flagpole, which no longer appears to be in use.

## **13.2.3 Integrity**

The Ruffner Funeral Home Historic District is in generally good condition, and what changes have been made are either compatible or can be reversed. The building is an outstanding example of early Territorial residential architecture and reflects the life of one of Prescott's early prominent citizens.

## **13.3 DISTRICT RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **13.3.1 Opportunities Within the District**

The Wells Residence has been recognized as one of Prescott's finest homes since it was first constructed in the 1870s. Occupying a prominent corner within the original Townsite, it has played an important role in town life throughout its history. It is close to many attractions of central Prescott and is easily accessible from either the downtown or Montezuma Street.

Traffic and development trends, however, have resulted in pressures to the South Prescott Townsite Historic District (which surrounds the Ruffner Funeral Home Historic District) that can threaten the integrity of the area. In some cases, these changes have been absorbed in a compatible manner, but in many other cases they have not.



*Roof and Window Detail*

Zoning, in particular, presents the most serious threat to the area, including the Ruffner Funeral Home Historic District. Business "A" zoning is a basic business classification for "neighborhood commercial" and apartments and has height allowances of up to 50 feet. Other concerns with this classification are lot coverage, setbacks and clearly incompatible uses.

For a full discussion of the past, present and potential future impacts of circulation, parking, development pressures, proximity to other land uses, and, of course, zoning, see the discussion within the South Prescott Townsite Historic District section of this Historic Preservation Master Plan.

For reference, the issues of most concern for the South Prescott Townsite Historic District are incompatibles uses, zoning that allows encroachment of inappropriately scaled multi-family and commercial uses in established residential areas, large height allowances, and multi-family densities so generous that they encourage demolition of historic structures for redevelopment of new medium and high density residential projects. Some areas of the South Prescott Townsite Historic District are recommended for down-zoning, including the Wells Residence property.

### 13.3.2 Specific District Recommendations

#### *Summary of Recommendations*

The following represents a brief summary of recommendations for the Ruffner Funeral Home Historic District. For a complete listing of recommendations for the historic neighborhoods surrounding this district, see the same table in the South Prescott Townsite Historic District section of this study.

**Table 13-1**

#### **Summary of Recommendations - Ruffner Funeral Home Historic District**

<i>Item</i>	<i>Observation/Recommendation</i>
Architecture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Retain historic front elevation of Wells Residence; do not allow ancillary buildings to impose on views from the public right-of-way on Cortez or Carleton Streets</li><li>• Encourage scale consistent with existing structures and styles</li><li>• Use gables and hip roofs consistent with historic pattern (including slopes - see text)</li><li>• Maintain historic orientation of front door/walk</li><li>• Maintain residential street emphasis in design</li><li>• Preserve historic clapboard; do not allow exposed concrete masonry or metal or vinyl siding</li><li>• Maintain historic treatments of columns, corbels, fascias and other Italianate details</li></ul>

- Repair/repoint brick where required at stem and planter walls
- Replace second floor porch railings on west elevation; repair second floor porch on north elevation
- Locate doors consistent with the historic pattern (see text)
- Emphasize vertical orientation on windows, use paired windows for a larger opening versus a large horizontal window
- Encourage wood for replacement doors and windows
- Encourage double-hung windows, with pane design to match existing (see text)
- Use wide trim and crown moldings around fenestrations to match existing (see text)
- Encourage the use of awnings
- Encourage stem walls with raised porches; face the stem wall with historically appropriate material
- Encourage continued use of existing driveway at northeast corner of property as the only automobile access
- Do not allow automobile parking in the parkways
- Remove "street lights" attached to the structure
- Discourage skylights and utilities on roofs visible from the public right-of-way

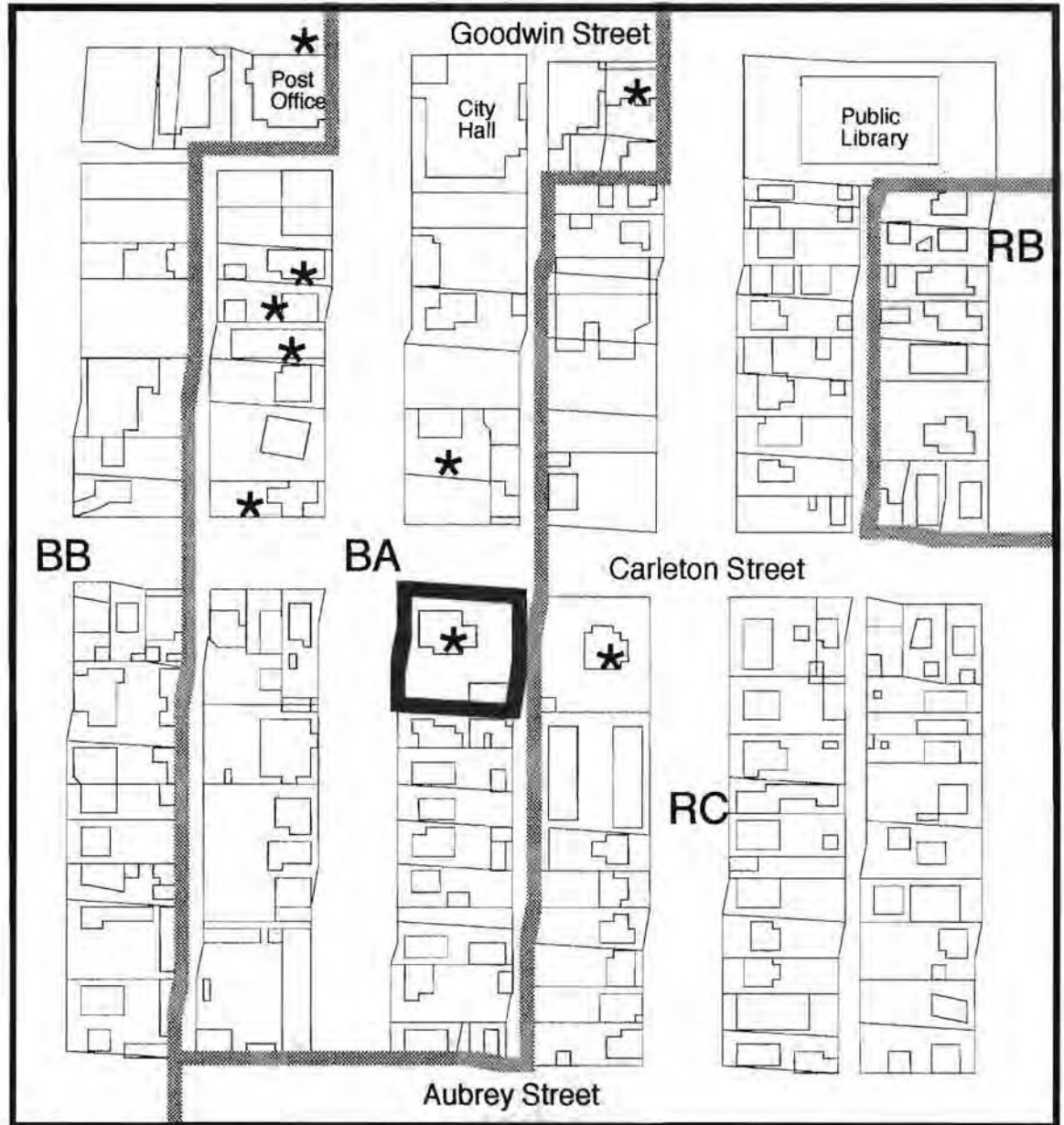
## **Streetscape/Landscape**

- Preserve existing street trees and mature pines on property
- Preserve formal south garden
- Preserve sandstone wall at Cortez and Carleton Streets along its entire length
- Use landscape to enhance (not cover) historic resources

## **District Opportunities**

- Promote continued use of the Ruffner Funeral Home Historic District as a residential-scaled business bordered by compatible uses
- See discussion in the South Prescott Townsite Historic District for recommendations concerning the surrounding National Register Historic District; these include future projects, circulation and parking, proximity to other land uses (development pressures), and zoning

# HISTORIC PRESERVATION MASTER PLAN



	Local District Boundary
	Property Listed on the National Register
RB	Residential B
RC	Residential C
BA/BB	Business A/B

Figure  
| 3 = |

Ruffner Funeral Home (Wells House)  
Prescott Historic Preservation District  
**District Boundary & Zoning**  
Not to Scale